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BOOK REVIEW

Fisheries Livelihoods and Governance: Lessons for Policy-making

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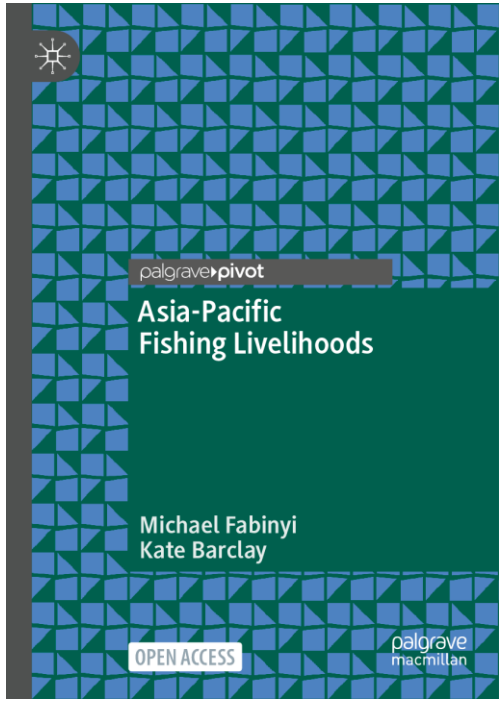
Fabinyi, Michael, and Kate Barclay. 2022. *Asia-Pacific Fishing Livelihoods*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan. xv + 112. SB ISBN 978-3-030-79593-1.



Before leaving for my preliminary fieldwork to the Andaman Islands, I had a conversation with a fellow PhD scholar[1] researching the islands who recalled the following incident. While travelling in an auto rickshaw, the driver remarked that one would never come across a beggar on the islands. After all, if one did not have anything, they could still fend for themselves by fishing in the waters. According to a Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) report (2022), in 2020, fishing employed an estimated 37.8 million people globally as full-time, part-time, unspecified,

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[1] Thank you, Shashank Bhardwaj, for the vignette.

and occasional workers. Even so, more has been written about landscapes than seascapes and the lives of those dependent on them. This gap is what the book *Asia-Pacific Fishing Livelihoods* seeks to bridge. Written by Michael Fabinyi (Professor) of the School of Communication and Kate Barclay (Professor) of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at the University of Technology Sydney (UTS), the book is an outcome of their years of qualitative research on fishing livelihoods in the Asia-Pacific. As they note, the Asia-Pacific region is home to the Coral Triangle, one of the world's most significant marine biodiversity hotspots, and hosts the largest number of fishers in the world. However, they use the region only as an anchorage point to draw specific case studies to extend their arguments.

In the globalized neoliberal order, the oceans are touted as the last frontier for "development". They are also seen as a recourse for sustaining ecological systems. Amidst this, fishers conduct the activity of fishing, which is shaped by these processes. But fishers are often portrayed as plunderers of the sea whose activities need to be managed. Strategies that increase economic benefits and minimise environmental effects are then implemented. Lost among all this are the differentiation within fishers and the myriad ways of practising livelihoods. The authors, therefore, use a relational approach—described as an intersection of political economy, institutional settings, and local social relationships—to advocate for management strategies that take into account this differentiation.

Chapter 1 provides an introduction that details the approaches used to look at fishery livelihoods and governance. It critiques reductionist ways of looking that consider the diversity in fish and fishers only in terms of dollars and management strategies. And as a counter to the normative, the authors position their relational approach, a combination of broadly three ways of looking, within the evolving field of marine social science. First, derived from Tim Ingold (2018), livelihood is seen "as a set of activities operating in relationships with other processes and people over time, and that livelihoods are shaped by people's relational positions in society" (Fabinyi and Barclay 2022, p. 11). Second, they draw upon David Mosse's (2010) view of poverty as a function of "historically developed economic and political relations … social categorisation and identity". Third, they consider the role of institutional arrangements in shaping access to and exclusion from resources based on the works of Hall *et al.* (2011) and Li (2007). This relational approach guides discussions on livelihoods and governance in the subsequent chapters.

Chapter 2 examines the consequences of globalization for fishing livelihoods and the ensuing difficulties for governance by taking examples from the Western Philippines and Papua New Guinea (PNG). Migrations

under colonial rule in Mindoro and Palawan in Western Philippines, internal rural–urban migration in PNG, and waves of globalization saw the diffusion of knowledge and technologies that changed the character and intensity of fishing as well as fishers (dealt with in detail in the following chapter). This subsequently opened new commodity frontiers and sites of capital accumulation. However, the increase in catch resulted in the depletion of resources along with the marginalization of those who were not able to step up. In Chapter 3, the authors examine cleavages within fisher communities brought on by larger processes. They consider how the intersection of ownership of the means of production, migration, and gender, have resulted in the exclusions of some in Western Philippines and Oceania. These chapters attest to two drawbacks in fisheries governance. Firstly, the inability of policies to factor in larger complex processes that lead to outcomes that are being controlled through strategies such as marine protected areas. Secondly, these resource management policies fail to take into account the social differentiation within fishers.

Chapter 4 focuses on fisheries governance and the role it plays in shaping livelihoods. Using case studies from Indonesia and Australia, the authors map parallel trajectories in fisheries governance. They note that the practice of fishing was motivated by economic growth and resource nationalism up to the recent turn towards market-driven management methods such as inter-transferable quotas (ITQ). The authors mention an interesting account of blue-fin tuna fishers in Australia, where a ranching system was developed after the introduction of ITQs, which boosted the local economy by generating jobs. However, this comes across as a lone case, for most of the accounts are harrowing and rightfully so. Consequently, in their review of stateist and neo-liberal strategies, the authors argue that governance strategies are not value-neutral, and, by moulding the context within which livelihoods are practised, they determine who will have access and who will be excluded. The concluding chapter attempts to provide a pragmatic solution for the concerns raised. The proposition is a well-being framework, as it would not only help stakeholders find common ground but would also help assess conditions and the effects of, say, governance. The authors highlight works (Abernethy *et al.* 2020; McClean *et al.* 2019; Voyer *et al.* 2016, 2017) by their UTS teams in Australia, Indonesia, and the Solomon Islands as examples. The varied framings of well-being—material, subjective, and relational well-being on one hand and non-economic social benefits on the other—the authors argue, are better able to take into consideration the wider (external and internal) relationships within which fishing occurs. Doing so breaks the telos of economic prosperity while

drawing focus to other aspects of fishing such as nutritional and food security, the role of women, quality jobs, and environmental sustainability.

The book is brief but rich. Each chapter could potentially be a book in itself. The arguments made by the authors reflect some of those made by Fikret Berkes in *Coasts for People* (2015), like whom the authors also conclude that fishery and its governance is a "wicked problem" (Jentoft and Chuenpagdee 2009). The moment one pulls at a particular aspect, the skein comes undone and unravels endlessly. But unlike Berkes, who adopts a socio-ecological standpoint, which is often accused of masking hierarchies and social differentiation, this book, by relying on a relational approach, is able to unmask the fluidity within fishing and the inadequacy of normative, objective, and all-encompassing governance strategies. By highlighting case studies from a region unfamiliar to me, the book revealed surprising similarities with fishing in the Indian seascape, especially the Andaman Islands, making the book an interesting read. However, in highlighting the deficiencies in microscopic ways of looking at livelihoods and governance, the fishers come across as victims. Seldom do they talk back. An occasional mention of such was the case of the Fiji mud crab fishers who formed their own resource management collective on account of gender-blinded policies. For even in such shadowing, fishers, just like others, find a way of negotiating their livelihoods (see Dobeson (2019)). Although this book doesn't fully capture the everyday experiences of Asia-Pacific fishers, it offers a helpful overview and highlights key issues faced by them, serving more as a prelude.

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